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A Darkened Heart

ALLEGIANCES

THUNDERCLAN

LEADER: Wolfstar- silver gray she-cat with gleaming yellow eyes

DEPUTY: Jaggedfang- reddish brown tom with light green eyes, has overgrown front fang (apprentice- Flamepaw)

MEDICINE CAT: Dappleleaf- brown and white tortoiseshell she-cat with dark blue eyes

WARRIORS: (toms and she-cats without nursing kits)

Addertooth: dark brown tabby tom with dark green eyes (apprentice- Fiercepaw)

Ravenclaw: jet black she-cat with green eyes (apprentice- Dewpaw)

Tigerfang: dark brown tabby she-cat with forest green eyes (apprentice- Hawkpaw)

Owltalon: sand colored tom with light brown eyes (apprentice- Rainpaw)

Blackfrost: black and white tortoiseshell with amber eyes

Runningspirit: golden she-cat with wild green eyes

Swiftpelt: creamy white tom with brown paws and ears, blue eyes (apprentice- Goldenpaw)

Cloudrunner: wiry gray tom with flecks of brown , green eyes

(apprentice- Dustpaw)

Shadowheart: solid black tom with a scar on his chin and over his

eye, one eye amber and other eye green

Snowstorm: solid white tom with greenish brown eyes

APPRENTICES: she-cats and toms in training to become warriors

Dewpaw: grey tom with brown eyes

Rainpaw: grey tom with green eyes

Dustpaw: dusty brown she-cat with blue eyes

Flamepaw: fiery she-cat with ice blue eyes

Fiercepaw: dark red she-cat with amber eyes

Goldenpaw: golden she-cat with white paws and amber eyes

Hawkpaw: hefty dark brown tom with green eyes

QUEENS: (she-cats expecting or nursing kits)

Sharpkit- dark brown she-cat, amber eyes

Heronflight-white she-cat with flecks of black, amber eyes

(kits- Petalkit: sandy brown she-cat with flecks of white; blue eyes, Mudkit: dark brown tom with a white stripe down nose, Willowkit: light brown she-cat with grey eyes, Lionkit: golden yellow tom with brown eyes

Ambertail- tortoiseshell she-cat with amber tail, green eyes

(kits- Badgerkit: dark colored tom with a white stripe down his head, Lillykit- sandy brown she-cat with white paws)

ELDERS:

Cherryfeather- brownish she-cat with green eyes

Dovewing- grey she-cat with green eyes

Mousewhisker- brown tom

Dustpelt- dusty brown tom, oldest cat in the clan

Shadowclan

LEADER: Snakestar - light brown tabby she-cat

DEPUTY: Darkshadow - black tom

MEDICINE CAT: Pineshade- dark brown tabby she-cat

WARRIORS:

Lizardclaw

Shredclaw

Weedtail

Ratclaw

Thistlefang

Crowpelt

Vinetail

Volefur

Frogleap

APPRENTICES:

Leafpaw

Rowanpaw

Cedarpaw

Nightpaw

QUEENS:

Mapleleaf

Foxtail

ELDERS:

Ratscar

Applefur

Snowbird

Riverclan

LEADER: Silverstar- silver she-cat

DEPUTY: Otterclaw- light brown tabby tom

MEDICINE CAT: Snowberry- pure white she-cat with blue eyes

WARRIORS:

Trouttail

Rockclaw

Blossomheart

Weaselfang

Willowfur

Sunpelt

Reedfeather

Blackcloud

APPRENTICES:

Pebblepaw

Seedpaw

Twistpaw

Mousepaw

Mosspaw

QUEENS:

Birdwing

Barkpelt

Sedgetail

ELDERS:

Reedwhisker

WINDCLAN

LEADER: Adderstar- dark brown tom

DEPUTY: Moonfeather- gray tabby she-cat

MEDICINE CAT: Patchfur- red and black tortoiseshell tom

WARRIORS:

Hareleap

Hollowfang

Waspclaw

Grassfur

Weedtail

Deerchase

Gorsepelt

Longtooth

QUEENS:

Bluesky

Quailfeather

APPRENTICES:

Mistpaw

Frostpaw

Falconpaw

ELDERS:

Nightcloud

Prologue

The black she-cat settled into her nest. *Starclan, I need to speak with you!*

Darkness engulfed the she-cat. She woke in a starry forest with a fragrant smell. *Why am I here, alone?*

Suddenly, the treetops rustled. A white and gray tom dropped from a branch.

"Cloudstar!" she meowed in surprise.

Usually, a former medicine cat spoke with her, not the clan leader. She shrugged. *It must be important then.*

The tom had a flicker of anxiety in his eyes, but he pushed it away. The she-cat tilted her head, she wondered what was wrong with the old Skyclan leader.

"I take it Skyclan is not doing well?" Cloudstar murmured.

"No, we are not. Lionstar has been having dreams of approaching darkness. And voices of cats that we once knew as evil, haunt both of our dreams." the black she-cat replied with sorrow in her voice.

"I was afraid of that." Cloudstar whispered. "I think I know what is

going on."

The she-cat widened her eyes, "What is it? I must know!"

"Well Frostshine, the four clans dealt with it many moons ago." Cloudstar answered.

"Well?"

Cloudstar let out a shudder, "Starclan isn't the only place cats can go after they die."

A spark of realization flashed in Frostshine's eyes. She knew this place, much to her dismay. She also knew that is where a few Skyclan cats were.

"The Place of No Stars has risen." Cloudstar finished.

Chapter One

The world spun around Flamepaw. She smelt the tang of blood in the air. The ground was wet with blood as well.

Her mother lay motionless on the ground. *Starclan, how could you be so cruel?*

Jaggedfang padded to stand next to her. Dewpaw stood a few tail-lengths away, taking in the scene with wide eyes.

Flamepaw let out an anguished cry and buried her nose into her mother's cold fur. *Why?*

Jaggedfang licked her ears, then bent down next to her, "Dewpaw and I are going to make sure the badger is off our territory. We will be back soon to bring her body to camp."

Flamepaw didn't respond. She heard pawsteps walk away. She tore away clumps of grass from the ground with her claws. Letting out an angry hiss very few moments.

Her leg was soaked with blood, but she didn't care. It scarcely even hurt. We was so blinded by grief, she couldn't feel anything.

How did I let this happen? What an idiot I am!

The sun was starting to disappear behind the line of trees. The pink sky cast shadows on the bloodied ground. After a while, Jaggedfang and the apprentice came back.

"No sign of it. I guess it went into Shadowclan territory." Jaggedfang announced.

Dewpaw didn't say a word, he just stared at his grey paws.

"Come on," Jaggedfang meowed, "Lets bring her back to camp."

He lifted the once beautiful queen, onto his powerful shoulders.

Greycloud's blood soaked into his fur. Flamepaw followed blindly behind him, stumbling every few steps.

Dewpaw was there to catch her every time. "Stop it! I don't need you!" Flamepaw hissed.

The gray apprentice helped anyways, not taking notice of Flamepaw's angry words.

Finally, they arrived at the thorn barrier. They ducked through.

. . . . .

Cries of surprise greeted them.

"What happened?"

"Greycloud!"

"Starclan, no!"

Flamepaw limped across the camp, sticking right next to her mother's body.

Addertooth appeared and let out a yowl. "No, no! Greycloud!"

Flamepaw let out a choked sob, then immediately tried to compose herself.

I'm not a kit. Stay strong.

Jaggedfang had placed her mother's body on the ground. Addertooth was with it, gently licking his mate's bloodied fur.

Then, Sharpkit appeared. When she saw her mother, her jaw dropped. She let out a screech and launched herself at Flamepaw.

"You stupid cat! I hate you! This is all your fault." She howled.

Flamepaw, unprepared for the attack, crumpled to the ground.

What's happening?!

She lifted her paw and swiped it across her sister's head, trying to get Sharpkit's claws out of her.

"Get off! Sharpkit stop!" Flamepaw hissed.

Sharpkit's claws slashed across her cheek, blood dripped to the ground.

Flamepaw heaved upward, throwing her sister to the ground. She gasped as pain hit her like a wave.

Sharpkit was up on her feet hissing before you could say *Mous*e.

" Jaggedfang, do something!" Wolfstar ordered.

Immediately, the deputy had Sharpkit on the ground squirming.

Flamepaw struggled to her feet. She turned to see Addertooth looking at her with disappointment and anger in his eyes.

He thinks that I did this.

"Flamepaw!"

She saw Goldenpaw and Fiercepaw bounding towards her with worry in their eyes.

Flamepaw ignored them and turned to look at her mother.

Sharpkit was right, this is all my fault.

Chapter Two

Flamepaw stared around the camp. Wolfstar had announced that the vigil for Greycloud was about to start.

Though her leg and scratches were on fire from where the badger and Sharpkit had attacked, she had no desire to see Dappleleaf.

She would probably make feel even worse.

Flamepaw looked up at Silverpelt. There would be one more star shining brightly tonight.

Greycloud , why did you have to go?

She felt fur brush her side. She looked to see Goldenpaw.

"I'm so sorry."

Here we go again. I don't want your pity!

Flamepaw grunted in response. She didn't feel like talking to anyone. She wanted to be left alone.

"The vigil for the beloved warrior, queen, and mate, Greycloud, has begun." Wolfstar announced.

Flamepaw wanted to sleep next to her mother one last time, but Sharpkit was there. So was Addertooth.

Let them get mad, I don't care!

Flamepaw limped over to the deceased queen. Her eyes were still open, wide with terror. Heronflight and Bluestream had washed the blood off of Greycloud's fur and made her pelt shine.

They're trying to make it look like it was a peaceful death!

She settled down next to her sister, who was asleep. She let out a

sigh. Everything would have been much easier if they didn't go outside camp that one day.

Sharpkit and Flamepaw would have been made apprentices together, like they said they would. Sharpkit also wouldn't hate Flamepaw.

She hates me more now, I'm sure of it.

She buried her nose into her mother's grey fur. A sweet, herb scent replaced the stench of blood.

Flamepaw felt Sharpkit growl, next to her.

"I wish it was you instead!" she hissed.

Flamepaw looked up at the stars.

Me too.

Chapter Three

A paw prodded Flamepaw in the side, "Come on, get up."

It was Jaggedfang.

Flamepaw hardly slept last night. Her dreams were filled with badgers and her mother's death. Her mother's screeches still echoed in Flamepaw's ears.

Why didn't Blustar come to see me last night?

Flamepaw shook her head in fury, *Probably too ashamed to show her face!*

Flamepaw turned her head, Jaggedfang was looking at her with pained eyes.

"If you ever need to talk, I'm here." he meowed.

Flamepaw nodded. *He's probably the only one I can talk to now.*

Flamepaw looked around for Sharpkit, she spotted her next to Addertooth. They seemed to be talking, pointing with their tails at Flamepaw.

Who cares anyway?

She padded to stand next to her mentor. She felt him lick her ears. *If he hadn't ran off the badger, I would be dead by now!*

"Thanks." Flamepaw whispered.

Jaggedfang tilted his broad head, "For what?"

"For saving me."

Jaggedfang grunted, "It's my duty as a warrior to defend my territory, that's simply what I was doing."

He glanced at Flamepaw's leg, "You seriously need to see Dappleleaf."

Flamepaw sighed. She knew he was right.

"If you go now, maybe you can say your goodbyes to Greycloud before they bury her."

Flamepaw nodded, and limped to the medicine den.

. . .

Dappleleaf was sorting through a pile of moss. Flamepaw cleared her throat, and the medicine cat turned around.

"Come, let me take a look at your leg." she ordered.

Flamepaw padded over to the she-cat. The medicine cat examined the wound and scampered over to a pile of herbs. She came back and applied them.

"It should get better soon." she mumbled.

Without replying, Flamepaw walked out of the den.

. . .

The elders, Dustpelt, Mousewhisker, and Dovewing, already had Greycloud draped across their backs.

Goodbye, mother...

Anger burned greatly inside of Flamepaw. Ho*w could Starclan let this happen? Why would they?*

She padded inside the apprentice den. She plopped into her nest. Goldenpaw looked over at her.

"Um... I'm so sorry." she whispered.

Flamepaw grunted, then drifted off to sleep.

. . . .

She woke in a starry forest. *Starclan? How dare they speak to me?!*

A blue she-cat padded out from behind a bush.

Before she could speak Flamepaw let out a hiss, "You let that happen! You are despicable! You could of at least told me first!"

Bluestar got a pained look on her face, "Look, Flamepaw, I'm sorry."

"No! No you aren't! I- I," Flamepaw was at a loss for words, "I despise you!"

Bluestar stepped back, her eyes downcast. "I truly am Flamepaw. I promise."

Flamepaw let out a sob. She missed her mother so much. Flamepaw shook her head. She couldn't act weak!

"Bluestar laid her tail on Flamepaw's back. "You will see her again. I'm sure of it."

Flamepaw looked into Bluestar's dark blue eyes. She trusted her. Though she was furious, she still trusted her.

Starclan began to fade, being replaced by a bloody stench. *What's going on?*

Dark mist hung around her paws. She heard voices all around her.

"'*Fire will save the clans!*'" a voice mocked.

"You poor little kit!" another hissed.

"You'll never see us coming!"

For once Flamepaw wasn't afraid. She felt no emotion, except anger.

"Why don't you show yourselves?" she growled.

Shadows shifted and hisses rang out. Growls of fury and rage did as well.

"You'll see us when we think the time is right!"

A yowl erupted and everything faded.

. . . .

"Shadowclan! Shadowclan is attacking!" a voice shrieked.

Flamepaw shot out of her nest. Growls of fury met her ears.

Why would they be attacking? We've done nothing!

Her eyes widened. Shadowclan cats filled the camp. She flung herself onto a tabby she-cat. She let out a screech.

I will win this battle!

Fury and rage filled her inside and she sunk her claws deep into the she-cat's neck. The cat howled and whipped around. She swiped her claws, Flamepaw twisted and raked her claws across the cat's flank.

The she-cat howled as she ran out of the camp. Flamepaw looked around for her next opponent. *I'll send them back to their territory!*

She stared at the camp. Addertooth was grappling with a huge tom. Wolfstar was fighting two tortoiseshell she-cats. Tigerfang had a tom pinned to the ground.

Where is Jaggedfang ?

Then she spotted him.

Her eyes widened in horror as she spotted her mentor on the ground, motionless.

Chapter Four

"No!" Flamepaw screamed.

She pelted towards her mentor, taking an apprentice down on the way. She halted next to her mentor.

"Ja-Jaggedfang?" Flamepaw whispered.

The huge tom lifted his broad head, and stared at Flamepaw. She felt uncomfortable under his gaze.

"I guess we should finish this battle, don't you think?"

Flamepaw's eyes widened. Her mentor couldn't fight! Could he? He looked terrible, his flank ripped, a claw torn out, and bite in his neck.

The deputy shakily got to his paws, then shook his head. Before Flamepaw could protest, he launched himself onto the Shadowclan leader.

Flamepaw blinked, trying to clear her cloudy mind. So much was happening!

She spotted an ugly tabby tom running towards her. Barely acting fast enough, Flamepaw jumped in the air, and sunk her claws into the tom's shoulder.

He screeched in pain. Flamepaw hissed in anger as the cat a whipped around and threw her into the air. She landed heavily, getting the breath knocked out of her.

She didn't have time to get to her paws. The tom charged into her, raking his claws down her flank.

Come on Flamepaw , you can do this!

Flamepaw struggled from his grip, and slashed her claws across the

tom's nose. Blood spattered to the ground.

Flamepaw desperately searched the camp for Jaggedfang. She spotted him pinning a gray she-cat to the ground. He nodded quickly at Flamepaw before slicing his claws across the she-cat's face.

At least he's well enough to fight...

Flamepaw noticed that the tom had left. But before to long, he was back, and he had another cat with him. He bared his teeth and leaped onto the apprentice.

The other cat he brought with him, was a she-cat. She slashed Flamepaw's ear, causing blood to swell.

This is a battle I cannot win!

Suddenly, Flamepaw went limp. She felt the tom's grip loosen. She let a small breath escape her.

"You killed her!" The she-cat growled in surprise.

"I-I thought she...I barely..." The tom studdered.

Then, seeing her chance, she heaved upward with all the force she could manage. The tom went flying.

Yes! It worked!

"Had to bring *another* to defeat me? Huh?" Flamepaw taunted.

The she-cat snarled and charged towards Flamepaw. Flamepaw easily stepped aside.

"Come on! You call yourself a *warrior*?" Flamepaw hissed.

Flamepaw sliced her claws across the she-cat's neck. She looked at Flamepaw with surprise, then went pelting into the trees. She left a trail of blood behind her.

Flamepaw didn't know where the tom was, and she really didn't

care.

She heard a screech by the nursery, and she saw three warriors trying to get in.

Shadowclan fights like foxes! They can't harm kits!

Rage rising in Flamepaw's belly, she launched herself on a gray tabby tom. He yelped in surprise. She sliced the tom's nose, then swiped his paws out from under him.

He let out a hiss, then bounded out of the camp. Flamepaw noticed that the other two Shadowclan cats were being attacked by three other cats.

Flamepaw jumped in surprise, it was Sharpkit, Lillykit, and Badgerkit! Sharpkit bit down on her opponent's ear. She howled in pain. Lillykit was feebly battling a tom three times her size.

Badgerkit was doing his best to help his sister. He nipped at the tom's paws.

They need help!

Flamepaw narrowed her eyes and charged in to the tom. He quickly turned around, flinging Badgerkit off. Lillykit watched with wide eyes as Flamepaw raked her claws across the cat's flank. Blood welled as skin met her claws.

Suddenly, Addertooth was on the tom, gently nipping at his neck. The tom struggled under Addertooth's weight.

"Don't think this is over!" The tom hissed.

Addertooth stepped off of the tom, allowing him to pelt into the line of trees.

Addertooth nodded at Flamepaw, then ran back into the throng of fighting cats. Sharpkit and Badgerkit were both battling the she-cat.

I might as well help them, even if Sharpkit gets angry.

Before Flamepaw could help them, the she-cat charged back into the trees, back to Shadowclan territory.

"Yeah, that's right! Go back to your own territory, you flea-pelt! Sharpkit snarled after her.

Flamepaw stepped back in surprise, her sister actually seemed...*fierce.* She looked battle hungry, and savage. She had blood dripping from one of her fangs, and her ears laid flat on her head.

She has changed. I just hope that it's not for the worst.

Chapter Five

"Shadowclan, retreat!" Snakestar yowled.

Immediately, every cat stopped fighting.

Wolfstar stepped forward, "Take your warriors and *leave.* This battle was worthless, Snakestar! If any of you are found on my territory, you will be *shredde*d, and that's a promise."

Snakestar flattened her ears and spat. "Don't think that this is over, Wolfstar."

Wolfstar snarled and slid out her claws, "*Leav*e!"

Snakestar flicked her tail and her warriors gathered. She hissed one last time, then led her wounded warriors out of the Thunderclan camp.

Flamepaw was out of breath, and her wounds stung. She still couldn't believe how good Sharpkit had fought.

She looked around the camp. Bramble tendrils lay strewn about and the grass under paw was spattered with blood. *They were cruel to attack our camp!*

Flamepaw remembered, Jaggedfang! He was hurt!

Panicked, Flamepaw ran through the camp looking for her mentor. She spotted him by the highledge, standing with a pained expression on his face.

"Jaggedfang, are you okay?" Flamepaw whispered, struggling to keep her voice from shaking.

Jaggedfang began to speak, then collapsed to the ground. Flamepaw desperately looked for the wound that was causing the blood to gush out onto the soft grass.

She glanced at Jaggedfang's neck and almost gagged. A claw mark stretched across his neck, a deep claw mark. Blood was gushing out.

"Help! Jaggedfang is badly hurt!" Flamepaw howled.

She heard pawsteps thrumming on the ground. Flamepaw looked up to see Dappleleaf with a wad of cobwebs in her mouth.

"Do something!" Flamepaw hissed through gritted teeth.

Dappleleaf nodded then began pressing cobwebs onto the wound. Slowly, but surely, the bleeding began to stop.

Flamepaw let out a sigh of relief when Jaggedfang lifted his broad head, "I'm not going to leave Thunderclan yet. Don't get your fur ruffled over me!"

Flamepaw's whiskers quivered, Jaggedfang was going to be alright! She licked her mentor on the head, then went to check on the other apprentices.

. . . .

Flamepaw settled into her nest. Though it was dawn, almost every cat was sleeping. Everyone was tired from the battle.

I definitely am.

It was just two days before that the badger attack had occurred. Flamepaw's leg still ached from where the badger had sunk its teeth into her soft flesh.

Flamepaw shook her head. She didn't want to think about that day, the day that everything had changed...

. . .

Flamepaw opened her eyes; light streamed through the den entrance. Flamepaw painfully got to her paws and yawned.

Suddenly, Wolfstar's voice rung out, "All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather!"

Flamepaw nudged Hawkpaw, who was peacefully sleeping, "Wake up! Wolfstar has called a meeting."

Hawkpaw grunted, then stretched.

"Ok, you don't have to wait for me." He meowed.

Flamepaw flicked her tail, then walked outside the den.

Cats were already gathered underneath the highledge. Wolfstar surveyed her clan through narrowed eyes, when she looked at Flamepaw, she nodded. She had a strange look in her eyes. It looked like... fear.

What's that supposed to mean?

Wolfstar began to speak once again," Sharpkit, Badgerkit, and Lillykit, please come forward."

Badgerkit and Lillykit exchanged an excited glance. Ambertail immediately darted over and began to groom their fur.

Sharpkit stood with her head and tail held high.

Arrogant furball ! She thinks she's a gift from Starclan !

All three kits padded forward.

"Now, as you all know, these kits have waited a few extra moons before becoming apprentices as a punishment. I have decided that it is time for them to become apprentices." Wolfstar meowed.

Flamepaw watched her leader intently as she continued, "Runningspirit, you received excellent training from Jaggedfang, I expect you to pass down all you know to Badgerpaw."

Badgerpaw bounded forward to touch noses with his new mentor. He definitely had a good one. Runningspirit was a great fighter and one of the clan's best tree climbers.

"Owltalon, you have received excellent training from Addertooth. I expect you to pass down all you know to Lilly-"

"Wait!" Lillykit interrupted.

Wolfstar tilted her head, "Yes Lillykit? Is there a problem?"

Lillykit looked embarrassed, "Well, uh, actually I wanted to be Dappleleaf's apprentice."

Flamepaw turned to look at the medicine cat. She looked as surprised as the rest of the clan.

One of the elders gasped. No one was supposed to interrupt the clan leader, especially in a clan meeting.

Wolfstar nodded, then continued, "Since Lillypaw's wish is to become a medicine cat, her mentor will be Dappleleaf. Do you accept her as your mentor?"

Lillypaw nodded,"I do."

Dappleleaf began to speak, " This half moon, I will present you before Starclan at the moonpool. Then, you will officially become my apprentice."

Lillypaw came forward and touched noses with her new mentor.

Owltalon looked disappointed.

He must have been looking forward to his first apprentice.

Wolfstar flicked her tail, then meowed, "Snowstorm, you have received proper training from Whitesky, I expect you to pass down all you know down to Sharppaw."

Snowstorm purred as Sharppaw touched noses with him. Sharppaw looked as if she had just caught a massive squirrel. Her tail was held high, she had a cocky smirk on her face, and she stood straight.

Flamepaw rolled her eyes. Her sister could be so arrogant.

"Now, Sharppaw and Badgerpaw, Is it your wish to train to be a warrior and do you promise to learn the ways of our noble code?" Wolfstar questioned in her authoritative voice.

"Yes." Badgerpaw vowed.

Sharppaw whipped her tail, "Of course."

"Let's welcome our new apprentices!" Wolfstar meowed happily.

"Sharppaw! Badgerpaw! Lillypaw!" The clan welcomed the three new apprentices.

Flamepaw yelled their names loudly. She shouldn't be worried. Her sister was an apprentice now, surely she wouldn't be angry with Flamepaw anymore!

Sharppaw bounded over to Flamepaw with a sly look on her face, "Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

Flamepaw sighed, as she rolled her eyes "Gee, congratulations. I'm happy for you."

Sharppaw growled, "Don't think that you are going to be the best warrior, because *I* am."

Her sister flicked her tail, then joined the other apprentices. They began to gather around her, congratulating her.

I think she has changed for the worst. ..

Chapter Six

"No! Not like that you mousebrain!" Sharppaw hissed.

Flamepaw stopped her leap in midair. Sharppaw and her mentor, along with Flamepaw and her temporary mentor, Blackfrost, were practicing battle moves. Sharppaw seemed to criticize every move Flamepaw made.

"How do *you* want me to do it? Are *you* my mentor?" Flamepaw seethed, clenching her jaw.

Flamepaw's sister had only been an apprentice for two sunrises, but she had been acting like she was clan deputy.

Sharppaw's neck bristled, "Like this."

Sharppaw leaped up in the air, turned, then came crashing down on all four paws. She shot Flamepaw a snarky glance, then bounced up to Snowstorm.

"Well, was that good or what?" She meowed.

Ooh , I just want to claw her ears!

"That was very good. Now, let's see Flamepaw's." Snowstorm replied.

Flamepaw nodded, then padded in the middle of the clearing.

"Wonder if she even knows how? She's such a mousebrain!" Sharppaw whispered to Snowstorm.

"Hush!" Snowstorm cuffed her lightly on the ear.

Ha! Serves her right!

Sharppaw narrowed her eyes, then went silent.

I'll show her.

Flamepaw bunched up her hindquarters, then leaped into the air. She spun perfectly, then landed on all four paws. She shook her fur, then padded over to Blackfrost and Snowstorm.

Blackfrost was looking at her with an approving expression on her face. Snowstorm nodded approvingly.

"I did better." Sharppaw growled.

Flamepaw hissed and dug her claws into the ground Her patience was thinning with her sister. Sharppaw stepped forward, her hackles raised.

Blackfrost darted between the two apprentices, "Enough! You are not kits!"

Flamepaw flattened her ears. For once she didn't feel bad.

Snowstorm padded forward, "Let's practice a different move."

"We will demonstrate what you will be practicing." Blackfrost announced.

"Watch closely." Snowstorm mewed.

Snowstorm sat a few tail-lengths away from where Blackfrost was standing.

"Now, I will be trying to pin Snowstorm to the ground. But watch, it's harder than it looks." Blackfrost explained.

Blackfrost leaped in the air, just as Snowstorm side stepped. But, instead of falling to the ground, Blackfrost landed squarely on his shoulders. She pinned him to the ground.

"Wow! How did you do that?" Sharppaw exclaimed.

"Its not about leaping where your opponent is, it's about leaping where they will *be*." Blackfrost meowed, while licking the dirt off her pelt.

"Now, I want you two to try." Snowstorm huffed.

So long as she doesn't criticize my every move.

Sharppaw stood a few tail-lengths away from Flamepaw, "I'll go first." Sharppaw announced.

Flamepaw stood still as Sharppaw leapt into the air. Flamepaw easily dodged, and Sharppaw crashed to the ground.

Flamepaw snorted. *So much for being the best warrior, Sharppaw!*

Sharppaw spun around with a snarl. "I'll prove I'm a better apprentice than you!"

Sharppaw charged in to Flamepaw. Sharppaw's claw caught on Flamepaw's ear. Flamepaw heard the sound of ripping flesh, then felt the warm feeling of blood. Flamepaw screeched then clawed at her sister's shoulder.

"You foxheart, get off!" Flamepaw seethed.

She didn't want to hurt her sister, but if she wanted a fight, she had one.

Flamepaw ducked a blow from her sister, then kicked her feet out from under her. Sharppaw hissed as she lost her balance, then thudded to the ground. Flamepaw growled, then pounced on top of her.

"Whose the better apprentice now?" Flamepaw hissed, blood oozing from a nick in her ear.

Teeth met her scruff and drug Flamepaw off of Sharppaw.

"What do you two think you are doing?! You are clanmates, littermates. You are sisters for Starclan's sake!" Blackfrost gruffly growled.

Snowstorm just sat a few tail-lengths away, watching with dissapointment in his eyes.

Sharppaw got up, and shook her fur. Her shoulder had a scratch on it, but that was all. She stared at Flamepaw with hatred blazing in her amber eyes.

"Why does everyone hate me?" Flamepaw cried.

She growled, then ran into the forest. She didn't care if they were angry with her running off like this.

Just let them! I don't care!

Her paws kept getting tangled in roots, and she kept tripping on logs and brambles.

All of a sudden, a strange scent wafted over Flamepaw. She stopped running and scented the air. It smelled of Thunderclan, that was for sure.

She heard someone talking to another. The voice sounded like, Shadowheart!

Flamepaw was not fond of this warrior. He seemed mysterious. Even though he was one of the clan's best fighters, she didn't like him.

Flamepaw decided to spy on him. She carefully creeped forward, taking notice of her surroundings. She was only a foxlength away, when she was able to hear him.

She made out a different voice, one that was not from Thunderclan. Flamepaw tried to get a peek, to see who the other cat was, but she didn't want to give herself away.

"Of course, if that is your wish." Shadowheart was meowing.

I wish I knew who he was talking to!

She heard the other voice, but it was muffled.

Shadowheart spoke again, "Don't worry. I'll get the job done-"

Flamepaw almost gasped. She knew who the dark warrior was

talking to. She shook her head. Surely this couldn't be happening.

He was talking to Tigerstar.

Chapter Seven

No. This couldn't be happening! Tigerstar was supposed to be in the Place of No Stars, not standing in the real world! Actually, he was supposed to be dead!

It's got to be my imagination! This has to!

Flamepaw shook her head, then looked up. Tigerstar was gone.

Flamepaw's heart was beating in her chest loudly. She was sure that even Riverclan could hear it.

It must have been my imagination then.

Shadowheart began walking towards her. She creeped deeper into the ferns, not making a sound. Finally, he was gone.

If it wasn't Tigerstar , then who was it?

Pawsteps sounded behind Flamepaw. She jumped around. It was Snowstorm. She let out a sigh of relief.

"What are you doing?" Flamepaw meowed quietly.

Snowstorm flicked his wars, "Looking for you."

Flamepaw looked down at her paws. She suddenly felt bad for storming off like she did.

"You know, I like you." Snowstorm meowed, his voice kind.

Flamepaw tilted her head, "What are you talking about?"

Snowstorm answered, "You said that everyone hated you. I don't. And neither does the clan."

"Sharppaw does."

Snowstorm sighed, then mewed, "She's just upset. Her apprenticeship got delayed, then her mother died. Also, she got most of the blame when you got attacked by the badger when you were a kit."

Flamepaw widened her eyes,"Really?"

Snowstorm nodded, "Yes, she did. She felt horrible, you know."

Flamepaw looked up through the trees, maybe Sharppaw wasn't as bad as she thought.

. . . . .

Flamepaw padded into camp, with Snowstorm beside her.

"Go get yourself something from the freshkill pile. You must be exhausted." Snowstorm meowed.

Flamepaw nodded then grabbed a shrew. She joined the other apprentices. Badgerpaw and Lillypaw were sharing a vole.

Lillypaw looked up," Oh, hey Flamepaw!"

Flamepaw sat her shrew down, "Hey. How is it being Dappleleaf's apprentice?"

"Oh, it's wonderful! I love learning about the herbs. Oh, and I like helping the cats too!" Lillypaw replied excitedly.

Badgerpaw leaned over, "Seems boring to me."

Flamepaw flicked him with her tail. She did agree though. Being stuck in a cramped den with sick cats all day did seem boring.

Flamepaw took a bite out of her shrew. The flavors danced on her tongue. It tasted so good!

The camp entrance rustled. Flamepaw saw that it was Shadowheart.

Her encounter with him and the anonymous cat was still fresh on Flamepaw's mind. There was definitely another cat there, but who

was it?

"You look like your trying to figure out something important. What's wrong?" Lillypaw asked.

Flamepaw realized that both littermates were staring at her.

"Oh uh, nothing. I was just thinking of how to do this battle move that Blackfrost taught me." Flamepaw quickly lied.

If anyone knew what she had seen, they would think that she was crazy. *I even think that I'm crazy!*

Flamepaw pushed her shrew in front of Badgerpaw. She had lost her appetite.

"I'm going to my nest." Flamepaw announced to them.

Badgerpaw shot her a questioning look, then dug into the shrew.

Flamepaw padded in to the apprentice den. Her nest looked so warm and comfy.

She plopped down into it. She let out a sigh.

Hopefully, I'm about to get some answers.

. . . . . .

Flamepaw coughed. She felt like she was being engulfed in smoke. She opened her eyes. She was!

Fire blazed all around her, making it hard to breath. The heat was intensifying, Flamepaw's fur felt like it was being scorched.

I've got to get out of here!

Flamepaw stared at the scene. She felt like the fire was closing in on her. She was surrounded.

Starclan help me now!

Flamepaw darted through a gap in the flames. Heat scorched her

whiskers and she felt sparks burning her skin.

All of a sudden, it felt like Flamepaw was dropping. She landed with a splash.

Water!

Immediately, the burning sensation on her skin ceased. A cool feeling of water soothed her.

Flamepaw went limp and let the water carry her. Wait, it wasn't carrying her, it was trying to drown her!

Flamepaw fought to swim to the surface. Water filled her lungs and streamed in her eyes and nose. The depths of the water was never ending!

Flamepaw stopped struggling. *At least I'll be with Greycloud now.*

She felt the presence of her mother near her. "*Don't give up! You must keep fighting!"*

Flamepaw didn't know if the small voice was her imagination or not, but she finally fought her way to the surface.

She gasped for air.

Suddenly, the scene changed.

Flamepaw was sitting on starry grounds. *Starclan...*

A handsome ginger tom, with a pelt like fire, padded near her.

"Who are you?" Flamepaw breathed.

The tom dipped his head, "I am Firestar. I was leader after-"

"Bluestar," Flamepaw finished. "I've heard a lot about you."

Firestar was the cat who defeated Tigerstar, well sort of.

Firestar flicked his ears, then mewed, "Beware, the mightiest flame can be destroyed by water."

Flamepaw tilted her head.

Firestar continued, "You are the flame, Flamepaw. Who is the water?"

Flamepaw opened her mouth to ask a question, but everything faded away, leaving Flamepaw alone.

Flamepaw closed her eyes, and gave way to the dizzying darkness.

Chapter Eight

Flamepaw woke with a start. She stared at the walls of the den, and her sleeping clanmates.

I don't think I'm dreaming anymore.

Flamepaw, knowing she couldn't go back to sleep, crept out of the den. The crisp night air felt good.

Flamepaw looked at Silverpelt, searching for her mother. *Greycloud, can you see me? I miss you.*

Flamepaw's recent dream was still fresh in her mind. Firestar's words echoed in her head, "You are the flame. Who is the water?"

*Who **is** the water?*

Flamepaw heard pawsteps. She spun around to see Jaggedfang standing behind her. His wounds from the Shadowclan battle were healing nicely. Soon, he would be able to mentor her again.

"You're up early." Jaggedfang commented.

Flamepaw shrugged, "Couldn't sleep. What about you?"

Jaggedfang sighed, "I'm just sick of being stuck in the medicine den. I would much rather be attending to my duties as deputy."

Now you know how I felt when I was a kit!

Brackenpelt was acting as temporary deputy, while Jaggedfang was in the medicine cat den. He seemed to enjoy his duties, but Flamepaw didn't think that he would make that good of an actual deputy.

"Dappleleaf said that I could return to my duties tomorrow."

Jaggedfang meowed, no emotion in his deep voice.

"Really? That's great!" Flamepaw meowed excitedly.

"Blackfrost will still act as your mentor though. Dappleleaf doesn't want my neck wound to 'open up again'."
Jaggedfang mewed, imitating Dappleleaf's voice.

Flamepaw giggled. Dappleleaf was such a worrier!

The bright sun was beginning to peek through the trees. Dawn patrol would be sent out any minute.

Jaggedfang hauled himself to his feet, "Better send out the patrol."

Flamepaw nodded. Hopefully, Sharppaw wouldn't be training with her today. Flamepaw just wanted to train by herself.

Addertooth, Snowstorm, and Redstorm padded out of the warriors den, and ran into the forest.

I *wish I could go with them.*

Flamepaw's thoughts were disturbed by Shadowheart briskly walking past. He shared words with Jaggedfang, then padded outside of the camp.

I wonder what he's up to.

Flamepaw began to follow the dark tom, but a tail brushed her flank.

"Where do you think you are going?"

Flamepaw looked up at Blackfrost.

"Oh, uh, I was just going to take a walk in the forest." She studdered.

Blackfrost blinked disbelievingly, then replied, "Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but we are going out training."

Flamepaw sighed, then dipped her head. Blackfrost flicked her black tail, then bounded into the forest.

. . . . . .

Flamepaw steadied her tail, then leapt into the air. She twisted, then landed on four paws.

Blackfrost nodded approvingly. Flamepaw had mastered the move that was taught the previous day. Flamepaw felt like she trained better when her sister wasn't around.

"Now, I want you to try the move on me." Blackfrost meowed, lashing her tail challengingly.

Challenge accepted!

Flamepaw, not waiting for her mentor's instructions, leaped in the air, twisted, then landed squarely on Blackfrost's back.

Blackfrost yowled in surprise, then tried to get the fiery apprentice off of her back. Flamepaw, claws sheathed, used her back paw, and tripped Blackfrost. Her mentor tumbled to the ground. Flamepaw pinned her to the ground.

"A warrior must always be ready!" She meowed, quoting Jaggedfang.

Blackfrost heaved upwards, throwing Flamepaw off. She landed with a thud.

"Oh really?" Blackfrost chuckled, her whiskers twitching with amusement.

Flamepaw stumbled to her feet, the padded forward, "Well, did I do okay though?"

Blackfrost nodded, "Oh yes! You did great."

Flamepaw felt her heart swell with pride. Sharppaw would be so jealous right now!

Blackfrost flicked Flamepaw with her tail, "Did you hear what I just said?"

Flamepaw's ears felt hot with embarassment, "Um, no."

Blackfrost sighed, "I said, if you catch two pieces of prey, we can return back to camp."

Flamepaw bounced on her paws. Maybe, she could spy on Shadowheart when she got back to camp! She was dying to see what the mysterious warrior was up to!

"Starting now. I will be watching you to see how well you do." Blackfrost mewed.

Flamepaw lashed her tail, then lightly bounded into the dense trees.

She immediately scented vole. Flamepaw dropped into her hunting crouch and carefully crept forward. The vole was sitting on a tree root, nibbling on a seed.

Quick as lightning, Flamepaw shot forward. She ended the vole's life with a quick bite to the neck.

One piece down, one more to go!

Flamepaw buried her catch. She had to find another piece of prey!

She decided to hunt near the Sky Oak. Swiftly making her way there, Flamepaw scented the air every few steps. Not only for prey, but for Shadowheart.

Finally, she arrived. Spotting a juicy pigeon, Flamepaw darted forward. Sinking her claws into it's soft flesh, she brought it down to the ground right as it was about to fly away. Flamepaw sunk her claws into it's neck, killing it.

It's definatley not the cleanest catch I've made!

Taking her catch in her jaws, she padded to where she had buried the vole. She dug it up, right as Blackfrost appeared.

"Nice job! That's a big pigeon!" She praised.

Flamepaw flicked her ears in response, as Blackfrost picked up the vole in her jaws. The two she-cats walked back to camp in silence.

When they arrived to the enterance, Brackenpelt greeted them.

"Hey, nice catch!"

Flamepaw nodded her thanks. She and her mentor dropped the kill onto the freshkill pile.

Blackfrost rested her tail on Flamepaw's shoulder, "Tomorrow, we'll do some tree training. Make sure you get good rest!"

"Okay." Flamepaw responded.

She looked around camp for Jaggedfang, and particularly, Shadowheart. She couldn't see either of them.

Goldenpaw bounced towards her, Badgerpaw at her side.

"Hey, Flamepaw!" Goldenpaw meowed as she greeted the fiery apprentice.

Flamepaw answered, "Hi Goldenpaw! What are you two up to?"

Badgerpaw stepped forward, "We are going to the Gathering tonight!"

Flamepaw's eyes widened in surprise. She had only been to one Gathering, she hardly remembered it. There had been so many cats, she didn't know who to talk to! So, she had ended up sitting right next to Greycloud. That had been when her mother had still been alive.

Flamepaw's eyes clouded at the painful memory.

Goldenpaw and Badgerpaw exchanged a glance.

Badgerpaw licked Flamepaw's ear comfortingly, "Cheer up! At least we'll be able to see Shadowclan!"

Goldenpay hissed, "Oh, if I see one of their apprentices, hold me back! I might just claw off their ears!"

Flamepaw let out a mrow of laughter. Goldenpaw could be so fiesty at times!

Badgerpaw rolled his eyes, "Okay, I'll try."

Goldenpaw cuffed him lightly on the head. The two apprentices began rolling on the ground, fighting playfully.

The happy mood was suddenly interrupted with a loud yowl.

"Jaggedfang! Jaggedfang is dead!"

Chapter Nine

Flamepaw felt as if the breath had been knocked out of her. Her legs seemed like they were about to crumble beneath her. The world seemed to spin.

Jaggedfang , dead? No! It can't be!

Flamepaw looked to see who the yowl had come from. She snarled, it was Shadowheart. Wolfstar pounded from her den.

"What? What did you say?" She mewed, fear edging her voice.

Shadowheart stood at the camp entrance, panting. Blood slowly oozed from a gash in his cheek and he had a claw mark across his flank that was trickling blood.

After gasping for air, he replied," D-Dogs! We were out on a patrol, they came out of no where! They ripped him to shreds! I tried to help him, but it was to late. I had to get out of there as soon as I could, or else I would have been killed as well!"

Liar! I know that's not the truth!

Blood drops were slowly dripping to the ground as the large warrior spoke.

Wolfstar's eyes clouded in grief. She composed herself, then meowed,"Are the dogs gone?"

Shadowheart nodded," Yes. They are. I managed to chase one off, but the three others were already attacking him. I stood no chance."

Flamepaw's fur was bristling, "Where is he then? To frightened to bring him back, eh?"

Shadowheart looked surprised, then he responded," He's by the Sky Oak. I couldn't bring him back, the dogs were still attacking him!"

Flamepaw snarled,"You left him to die!"

She couldn't believe him! He called himself a warrior? Warriors were supposed to defend their clan, *even at the cost of their life.*

Wolfstar stepped forward, "Flamepaw! Control yourself!"

Flamepaw widened her eyes. Wolfstar actually believed Shadowheart! How could she?

Flamepaw shook her head in anger, then dashed for the camp entrance.

"Flamepaw!" Badgerpaw yowled.

"Let her go." Wolfstar meowed solemnly.

Flamepaw pounded through the forest. Jaggedfang couldn't be dead! She had to find him!

Flamepaw wound through the trees, looking out for stray thorn tendrils.

The Sky Oak came into view and immediately, the scent of dog filled Flamepaw's nostrils. Flamepaw felt something wet underpaw, she looked down and choked. It was blood, and it was fresh.

Flamepaw scanned the tree for dogs before walking closer. There was no sign of any. Flamepaw carefully made her way towards the base of the tree. She stared at the ripped figure lying there.

It was unrecognizable. Lumps of bloodied fur scattered the ground. Flamepaw gagged. The cat's entire flank had been torn away, leaving bare bones exposed.

Shadowheart was not lying.

Flamepaw crumpled to the ground. Why was this happening? Why Jaggedfang? Why Greycloud? Why?

Why me?

Flamepaw couldn't bare to look at the pile of fur, blood, and bones that used to be her mentor. Flamepaw looked at the sky. Silverpelt was just beginning to shine.

"Jaggedfang, I know you are up there." Flamepaw whispered, " I'm sorry. I promise, I will try to be strong, for you."

Starclan , you are so cruel! What have I done wrong?

Flamepaw felt breath on her shoulder. Not caring to turn around, she felt fur brush her side.

"They aren't cruel you know."

Flamepaw flicked her ears at Wolfstar's words.

"Yes, they are." Flamepaw hissed.

Wolfstar drew a breath to continue, but stopped.

Flamepaw realized something. Wolfstar would have to appoint a new deputy. Moonhigh wasn't far away.

Wolfstar nudged Flamepaw's side, "We can't bring him back to camp."

Flamepaw tilted her head, "Why?"

"There's hardly anything left to bring."

Flamepaw growled, then remembered that she was talking to her clan leader, "What do you suggest we do then?"

Wolfstar dipped her head," We will have to bury him here."

Flamepaw held back a sob. How could she bury her own mentor?

Wolfstar whispered something as she looked up at Silverpelt. Flamepaw couldn't understand what the clan leader had said.

Flamepaw bowed her head before her fallen clanmate. *I will forever remember you, Jaggedfang. You taught me so much. Please watch me in Starclan.*

Wolfstar rose then walked over to a small area filled with daisies. The pretty colorful flowers filled the area. It looked like a good place to rest and relax.

Flamepaw shook her head. She had to focus on the task before her.

Wolfstar turned to look at Flamepaw, "I think we should bury him here."

Flamepaw nodded, then padded next to her leader. She sunk her claws into the warm earth, then began to dig.

Along side her leader, Flamepaw and Wolfstar got a hole dug. It didn't have to be that big. There was only so much left of Jaggedfang.

Flamepaw looked at Wolfstar with grief glittering in her eyes, "Wolfstar, I-I can't."

Wolfstar nodded, clearly understanding. Flamepaw watched as her leader brought Jaggedfang, what was left of him, and gently buried him.

Flamepaw watched, the world spinning around her. She felt sick. Sick at the sight, and sick at her loss.

Wolfstar turned around, her fur was matted with blood and dirt. Flamepaw looked at her pelt. It didn't look much better.

"Come on, we must get back to camp." Wolfstar quietly meowed.

Flamepaw stumbled after her leader. She blinked, then straightened herself. She couldn't seem weak in front of the clan.

She had seemed weak enough when Greycloud had died.

Wolfstar lead the way through the darkened forest. Leaves crunched under paw, as well as twigs. The forest looked like a completely different place at night.

The two she-cats arrived at the camp entrance. Redstorm was waiting for them.

"Well, where is he?"

Wolfstar looked him in the eyes, "He's gone. We already buried him."

Grief glittered in the tom's eyes. He bowed his head, then walked away.

Wolfstar brushed her tail against Flamepaw's back, then bounded onto the highledge.

"Cats of Thunderclan, please gather."

Cats began wearily padding from their dens. Most of the clan soon sat underneath the ledge, staring up at Wolfstar.

Wolfstar sighed and went on," Most of you know, Jaggedfang died today. The time has come to name the new deputy."

There was silence throughout the camp.

"Though his body is not with us, I say this now. Starclan, please hear and approve my choice."

Not Shadowheart . Please, don't choose him.

"The new deputy of Thunderclan, is Snowstorm." Wolfstar finished.

Flamepaw let out a sigh of relief. *Thank Starclan!*

"Also, as you know, Jaggedfang was Flamepaw's mentor. I will now appoint her a new one." Wolfstar announced.

Flamepaw prayed to Starclan that it would be Blackfrost. She liked the cunning she-cat. She was a good fighter, and she had good humor.

"Flamepaw's new mentor is, Shadowheart."

Chapter Ten

"What?!" Flamepaw gasped.

She could feel the stares of her clanmates burning into her. Wolfstar looked at her with a questioning gaze.

"Yes, your mentor is Shadowheart. If you don't like it, I'm sorry." Wolfstar meowed sternly.

Flamepaw dug her claws into the ground. Could Wolfstar not clearly see that Flamepaw despised Shadowheart? Why would she do this to her?

She's as cruel as Starclan !

Shadowheart, looking pleased, stepped forward.

He bent down to touch noses with Flamepaw,"I'm sorry for your loss."

Flamepaw reluctantly touched noses with him. Letting a growl rumble in her throat, she stepped back. The clan was still looking at her with wide eyes.

Wolfstar was still staring at Flamepaw, her eyes narrowed.

"The meeting is over!" Wolfstar called over her shoulder, as she jumped down from the ledge.

She padded over to Flamepaw, "In my den...now."

Flamepaw nervously nodded. She cast a glance at Goldenpaw, who was looking at her with sympathy in her eyes.

Let's get this over with.

...~...~...~...~...~...

Wolfstar settled down into her nest after she had brought Flamepaw into her den.

"Well?" She meowed.

Well what? I don't even know why she brought me in here!

Flamepaw sighed,"What?"

Wolfstar rolled her yellow eyes, "Why did you do what you did out there?"

Flamepaw felt embarrassed, but she was still upset with her leader.

"I just, don't particularly...like Shadowheart." Flamepaw studdered.

I'm in big trouble.

Wolfstar narrowed her eyes,"Why?"

I can't tell her! She would think I am crazy! Shadowheart is one of her best warriors!

*"*Well, um, because..." Flamepaw searched her mind for a believable lie. "Because, I think he was in love with Greycloud. And I just um..." Flamepaw's voice trailed off.

Really, Flamepaw ? That's the best you can come up with? That's seriously unbelievable.

Wolfstar looked surprised, "Oh? I never really noticed." The she-cat shrugged, "Well, just try to listen to him the best you can. He's one of my best warriors, I think he will teach you a lot."

Flamepaw sighed. She was sure that Blackfrost could teach her just as much as Shadowheart could. Maybe even more!

"Anyways, that's no excuse for acting the way you did, even if you don't like him. As your punishment, you will have to clean out the elders den all day tomorrow, and tend to the elders." Wolfstar meowed sternly.

No! Not the elders!

"Even though you don't deserve it," Wolfstar began, "I am taking you to the Gathering tonight. It is about to start very soon."

Flamepaw dipped her head respectfully at her leader. Though she was excited about the Gathering, a pang of sorrow stabbed her heart. Jaggedfang would not be with her.

She's probably letting me go to take my mind off of Jaggedfang's death.

"Go on then! We are about to leave." Wolfstar urged Flamepaw out of her den.

Flamepaw flicked her ears, then skirted out of the leader's den.

...~...~...~...~

Cats were already milling about by the clan entrance,when Flamepaw come out of Wolfstar's den. Addertooth, Blackfrost, Tigerfang, Brackenpelt, Runningspirit, and Snowstorm were waiting.

Goldenpaw was showing Badgerpaw the correct way to do a hunters crouch. When Goldenpaw saw Flamepaw coming, her eyes lit up.

"Hey! Are you in big trouble?"Goldenpaw asked urgently.

Flamepaw shrugged, "I guess I'm not in that deep of trouble because I'm coming to the Gathering."

Goldenpaw gasped, "Really?" She sighed, "You can tell that Wolfstar favors you."

Flamepaw widened her eyes,"What? No she doesn't! She gave me the worst men-"

"Ready to go?"

Flamepaw whipped around to see Shadowheart hovering over her.

"Um, yeah." Flamepaw mewed quietly.

I really hope he wasn't listening to our conversation!

Flamepaw looked over her shoulder, Goldenpaw and Badgerpaw were trying not to laugh.

They're lucky they don't have a horrible mentor!

She felt Wolfstar walk past her.

"Before we go, let me just say this. Jaggedfang was a loyal and courageous deputy. He will be missed greatly. Even though he may have died, his spirit will always be among us, in Thunderclan!" Wolfstar meowed clearly.

Suddenly, every cat in the clan began calling out her mentor's name.

"Jaggedfang! Jaggedfang!Jaggedfang!"

Though her mentor and mother were gone, Flamepaw felt a renewed strength. She couldn't let her loss get in the way of being a good warrior!

Flamepaw turned around to look at the clan entrance. Her eyes widened.

Bluestar and Firestar stood there.

Am I the only one seeing this?

Bluestar opened her mouth to speak, "*Be strong, Flamepaw."*

Firestar stepped forward, "*We are always watching."*

Flamepaw nodded her head to the leaders. She closed her eyes and thought about her past.

Greycloud would always be watching her, and so would Jaggedfang. Her clan would support her, and Bluestar would guide her.

I can't let my past control me. I must be strong. For my clan, for Greycloud , and for Jaggedfang .

When Flamepaw opened her eyes, the two leaders were gone.

Chapter Eleven

Flamepaw looked around the camp for the two leaders. They were no where to be found.

I don't think that was my imagination, I think it was a vision!

"Come on Flamepaw! You don't want to be left behind!"

Goldenpaw's smooth voice distracted Flamepaw from her thoughts.

"Oh, uh yeah! I'm coming!" Flamepaw distractedly called.

Flamepaw took one last look at the camp, then bounded after her clanmates.

...~...~...~...~...

"Whoa! There's so many cats!" Badgerpaw meowed, obviously amazed at the other clans.

Thunderclan had just arrived at the island, and Badgerpaw had immediately begun to explore.

Though every apprentice acted this way at their first Gathering, Flamepaw felt annoyed. *He's acting like a kit!*

Flamepaw shook her head. She was just getting agitated from the loss of Jaggedfang.

Tonight is my first Gathering with out him.

Flamepaw straightened up, remembering what Firestar and Bluestar had said. She couldn't rely on her past anymore.

"Hey, Flamepaw, let's go talk to the other apprentices!" Goldenpaw flicked Flamepaw's ear with her tail.

Flamepaw was now excited. Maybe she could learn all little about

the other clans. And, maybe learn why Shadowclan had attacked!

"Ok Goldenpaw!" Flamepaw replied happily.

She followed the golden apprentice to where a large group of apprentices were talking.

Flamepaw felt nervous on the inside, but she hid it well.

I must seem fierce and strong.

"Hi everyone! This is Flamepaw." Goldenpaw announced to the apprentices.

A few dipped their head in greeting, but the Shadowclan apprentices simply flicked their tails with annoyance.

Flamepaw spotted a small she-cat. She immediately recognized that this was the cat she took down in the battle. She was very easy to defeat.

Probably a newly made apprentice.

A dark brown tabby stepped forward, "Hey, I'm Falconpaw."

Flamepaw dipped her head in greeting. The tom was scrawny, but she could see his bulging muscles underneath his skin.

Wonder how well he fights? I hope I don't have to find out.

The other apprentices were all talking about an old elders tale. But, something seemed wrong.

Flamepaw noticed that Windclan wasn't speaking to Riverclan, and Shadowclan wasn't speaking to Thunderclan.

That's odd. Surely there's nothing going on.

"Let the Gathering begin!"

Flamepaw easily recognized the voice of Adderstar, the Windclan leader.

Flamepaw let her gaze drift to the base of the tree. She scanned all of the deputies. Snowstorm was with them. He was sitting next to Moonbreeze, the Windclan deputy.

Flamepaw noticed that the Shadowclan deputy, Darkshadow, and the Riverclan deputy, Otterclaw, were casting angry glances at the other deputies.

Something is wrong.

Adderstar began to speak, "Windclan is doing well. Many kits have been born, and many apprentices made. Mistpaw and Frostpaw are here tonight as new apprentices."

"Frostpaw! Mistpaw!"

No Riverclan cat called the new apprentices names. Only a few Shadowclan did as well.

Wolfstar looked surprised. Every clan was supposed to honor the path of becoming a warrior.

The two Windclan apprentices seemed crestfallen.

I would be to if hardly anyone called my name too.

The Windclan leader stepped back. He beckoned for Wofstar to go next.

"Thunderclan is thriving. There has been much prey and there has been no sign of twolegs." Wolfstar announced to the crowd.

Wolfstar seemed like she was hiding something. And so did Adderstar.

Wolfstar continued, "Also, I am heartbroken to say, that Jaggedfang went to join Starclan today."

A few gasps came from the crowd. Jaggedfang was a popular cat, and a senior warrior. Many cats had admired him.

"The new deputy of Thunderclan is Snowstorm." Wolfstar meowed

loudly.

Snowstorm dipped his large, white head as a few cats called his name.

Flamepaw looked up at the brightly shining stars. She knew that Jaggedfang was watching her, always.

The Shadowclan leader came forth. Flamepaw sunk her claws into the ground. She despised Snakestar.

Oh, how I wish Wolfstar had mentioned how we beat them in battle! I'd love to see the look on her face!

Snakestar began to speak, "Silverstar and I wish to speak together."

Wolfstar and Adderstar looked a bit surprised. Usually, leaders only did this when something was wrong.

"Go ahead then." Adderstar meowed.

Silverstar stepped forward and let out a hiss, "Both of your clans have been trespassing on both of our territories!"

Outraged yowls erupted from the crowd of cats.

Flamepaw let out a growl. How dare they accuse Thunderclan of trespassing? They had no proof! And besides, Thunderclan had everything they needed inside their boundaries; why would anyone want to go to another clan's territory?

Flamepaw could feel Falconpaw tense beside her. She stared around the island. All around, cats were separating into their own clans.

Falconpaw nudged Flamepaw on the side, "Come on."

Flamepaw noticed that Thunderclan and Windclan were together on one side of the island, while Shadowclan and Riverclan were on the opposite.

The leaders still stood on the roots of the tree.

Wolfstar darted forward, "What do you mean Silverstar? No Thunderclan cat has stepped over the boundary lines, whatsoever!"

Snakestar lashed her tail, "Oh! So Thunderclan are trespassers and liars!"

Adderstar let out a hiss, "No Windclan cat has trespassed either!"

Silverstar pulled her lips back in a snarl, "Oh really? Then why is half of our territory smeared with *your* scent?"

Adderstar jumped back in surprise.

Flamepaw looked up at the moon. Surely Starclan would put an end to this! They had to!

Wolfstar whipped around to face Snakestar, "Is this why you attacked us this moon?"

Snakestar hissed, "That was just a battle for territory, this is a completely different thing! *Your* clan has been trespassing!"

Wolfstar growled, "No we haven't!"

Snakestar glanced at Silverstar, then lashed her tail.

All of a sudden, screeches filled Flamepaw's ears. Flamepaw stared wide eyed as Snakestar launched herself on to Wolfstar. Silverstar leaped on top of an unprepared Adderstar, bowling him over.

All around Flamepaw cats were fighting. Each clan against each other.

This can't be happening!

Suddenly, a large tabby tom that stunk of Shadowclan, leapt on top of Flamepaw.

"What are you doing? The truce!" Flamepaw howled.

The tom laughed, then dug his claws into Flamepaw's shoulder, "Are you kidding? Starclan *approves* of this battle! Why do you think the

moon is still shining?"

Without responding, Flamepaw slithered from the tom's grasp, and raked her claws down his face. Blood spattered to the ground.

Put a stop to this, Starclan !

The tom charged her again. Flamepaw side stepped, and jumped on top of the tom. Flamepaw recognized this tom as Shredclaw, of Shadowclan.

Flamepaw struggled to dig her claws into his shoulders. He dropped to the ground, and rolled, bringing Flamepaw crashing to the ground.

Flamepaw was weakening. She couldn't keep this up for long.

She looked up at the sky.

Starclan , why are you doing this?

Despite Flamepaw's silent pleas, the moon still shined brightly in the darkening sky as the cries of battle faded into the night.

Chapter Twelve

Screams of pain and agony clawed Flamepaw's ears. The stench of blood was almost overbearing.

Flamepaw heard a snarl behind her. It was Shredclaw.

"Are you just going to stand there like a frightened kit?" The Shadowclan tom taunted.

Rage filled Flamepaw. She screeched, then charged into the tom. He growled in surprise.

I'll show you that I'm no kit!

Flamepaw clamped her jaws around the warriors foreleg. He thrashed around wildly, trying to get the apprentice off.

Thinking of Jaggedfang made Flamepaw fight even harder. She let go of the tom's paw, then moved to bite down on Shredclaw's shoulder.

Anticipating the move, Shredclaw side stepped, tripping Flamepaw.

She landed to the ground, stunned.

Before she knew it, the tom was sinking his fangs into Flamepaw's hind leg. She screeched in pain. She could feel the flesh tear, and the warm scent of blood filled the air.

Flamepaw struggled to move, but she couldn't. The tom had her pinned down too well.

I'm powerless to do anything!

Flamepaw bit down on the tom's paw, right as he was about to swipe it across her face. Suddenly, the weight of the tom disappeared.

Flamepaw rose to see Falconpaw and Goldenpaw fighting Shredclaw side by side.

Flamepaw darted over to them to help.

Goldenpaw was raking her claws across Shredclaw's flank, while Falconpaw was darting back and forth, aiming a few blows to his head.

Flamepaw charged into the tom, sending him sprawling. Immediately, Goldenpaw was on the tom, nipping at his neck.

Falconpaw sliced his claws across his nose. Shredclaw snarled, then forced Goldenpaw off of him.

"You'll be sorry you ever trespassed!" Shredclaw hissed.

The ugly tom darted into a throng of fighting cats.

Flamepaw turned to Goldenpaw and Falconpaw, "Thanks."

Falconpaw nodded, and Goldenpaw lashed her tail.

"Lets go!" Flamepaw growled.

The three apprentices charged into the throng of fighting cats. Flamepaw examined her surroundings.

Snowstorm had a black she-cat pinned to the ground. Silverstar was battling Hareleap, of Windclan. Darkshadow had Ravenclaw writhing underneath his claws.

She ne eds help!

L

ting out a snarl, Flamepaw leaped onto the Shadowclan deputy. He jerked in surprise, giving Ravenclaw time to free herself from the tom's grasp.

The black warrior nodded her thanks to Flamepaw, then flung herself onto Darkshadow. The two cats began raking their claws on

each other.

Out of no where, Adderstar barreled into Darkshadow, causing him to crash to the ground, which sounded very painful.

Flamepaw shook her head. Ravenclaw didn't need her help anymore.

All of a sudden, Flamepaw felt claws pierce her back. She howled in pain.

She weighed around to see Mosspaw, of Riverclan.

The gray tom bared his teeth. With a yowl Flamepaw leapt onto him. Mosspaw flipped Flamepaw over and sliced his claws across her neck.

Blood immediately began to stream out of the wound. Filled with fury, Flamepaw started to pelt towards him. Something was holding her back.

She didn't feel pain until after the apprentice removed her claws. Flamepaw screeched as the claws left her flank.

The cat who had just joined in the fight was Pebblepaw, also of Riverclan.

"You two are fools! No Thunderclan cat has stepped foot on your territory!" Flamepaw seethed.

Pebblepaw swiped her claws across Flamepaw's nose, "Liar!"

Flamepaw kicked Pebblepaw hard in the chest before whipping around to face Mosspaw.

"Even if we did trespass," Flamepaw paused to rake her claws across Mosspaw's cheek, "You should've at least had the courage to attack outside of a Gathering!"

Pebblepaw was back up on her paws. She ran, spitting, into Flamepaw. Flamepaw fought back fiercely, trying to hold off two apprentices.

The battle move that Blackfrost had taught her flashed in Flamepaw's mind.

She leaped into the air, twisted, then landed on top of Mosspaw. She sunk her claws into both of his shoulders. He screamed in agony.

She leapt off of him and turned to face a surprised looking Pebblepaw. With a swift movement, Flamepaw sliced her claws down Pebblepaw's eyes.

The apprentice writhed around on the ground. Pebblepaw had long scratches across both eyes that had blood bubbling.

A dark brown tom blocked Flamepaw's path. She looked up. It was Otterclaw, the Riverclan deputy.

"Thought you could get away with harming *m*y apprentice huh?"

The tom swiped Flamepaw's feet from under her. She fell to the ground. He sunk his back claws into her hindquarters, and his front claws into her neck.

"I'll give you a choice," The deputy hissed, "Admit to trespassing, or suffer!"

He's such a foxheart !

Flamepaw looked him in the eyes, "Never!"

Otterclaw bared his fangs, then sunk his claws deeper, and deeper into Flamepaw.

The pain was horrible. Flamepaw cried out in agony. Blood was beginning to pool around her.

Flamepaw tried to fight back, but she couldn't move. The pain was almost blinding now. Flamepaw felt teeth meet her shoulder.

Flamepaw was beginning to feel dizzy. The world spun, the trees swirled. Everything became blurry.

Am I going to die?

Suddenly, Flamepaw heard a crack. Louder than anything she had ever heard in her life.

The claws and teeth that had been sinking into her flesh, disappeared.

Though her vision was blurry, Flamepaw saw a streak of orange coming towards her.

The scent filled her nostrils, making it hard to breathe.

Fire!

Flamepaw dragged herself as far as she could. She was so weak, and couldn't even see anymore. She felt blood pulsing from multiple wounds. She collapsed to the ground.

Someone, help...

Chapter Thirteen

Flamepaw felt the heat intensify. She could hear the crackling of fire right next to her. She could feel the fire begin to scorch her skin.

Suddenly, Flamepaw felt teeth meet her scruff. The figure began dragging Flamepaw away from the fire. She opened her eyes but the pain and the smoke made it impossible to see.

Who is this helping me?

The scorching heat wasn't as intense now. Flamepaw felt herself plop to the ground, and the feeling of teeth in her scruff, disappeared.

She heard anxious voices over her. Flamepaw let out a moan. She felt like her body was on fire.

"Thank Starclan! She found her way out!" Flamepaw heard someone call.

Flamepaw was bewildered. She didn't find her way out, someone helped her!

"N-No. I d-didn't." Flamepaw protested weakly.

Flamepaw winced as she spoke. It hurt to move. Though the figures hovering over her were blurry, she could tell that one of them was Wolfstar.

"How else would you have gotten here?" Wolfstar gently meowed.

Flamepaw tried to shrug, but just moaned. It seemed like something was dragging her. Dragging her down into a pit of darkness.

Flamepaw felt her eyes begin to close.

"No, Flamepaw! Don't go!" A voice howled.

Flamepaw tried to respond, to tell the cat that she would be okay, but she felt so tired. So very tired.

Flamepaw couldn't do anything else, but to let the earth around her fade, and give way to never ending darkness.

...~...~...~...~...~...~...

The air around Flamepaw was crisp and chilly. Flamepaw opened an eye.

She was in Starclan. However, the place didn't seem like the starry safe haven for the long gone warriors, apprentices, and leaders; something seemed wrong.

Flamepaw rose to her paws.

"H-hello?" Flamepaw called into the cold air.

Starclan is not supposed to be cold like this!

The ferns beside Flamepaw rustled, and she unsheathed her claws. Instead of meeting an enemy to fight, a beautiful starry, grey she-cat stepped out.

Flamepaw's jaw dropped.

"Greycloud!" Flamepaw shouted with joy.

She pelted to her mother's side and burrowed her nose into her soft, grey fur.

"I've missed you so much! Why haven't you come to see me?" Flamepaw whispered.

There was so much she had to ask her!

Greycloud pulled away from her daughter, something darkened her gaze.

Flamepaw looked closely at her mother. She looked...hurt.

"Greycloud, what's wrong?"

Greycloud shook her head, "N-Nothing. Nothing at all."

The grey queen padded over to a cliff-like rock. Down below, there were cats milling about. The scent of fear was wafting up to where Flamepaw was sitting.

Flamepaw looked closely at the ground far below. There was... blood!

She whipped around to see Greycloud looking at her with a pained expression on her face,"What happened here?"

Flamepaw felt angry. Why wouldn't she tell her?

"Tell me!" Flamepaw pleaded.

Greycloud sighed,"There was a battle today."

Flamepaw gasped, "In Starclan?!"

Greycloud nodded.

Surely not! Starclan was a place where only good things happened.

The Great Battle was an exception, but today?

I wonder who would attack Starclan? I wonder who could *attack Starclan?*

"By whom?" Flamepaw breathed.

Greycloud murmured,"By Mapleshade and a few other Darkforest rogues."

Flamepaw's heart seemed to stop. *How?*

"That's why we couldn't see the battle down at the Gathering. We were fighting our own." Greycloud continued,"Luckily, it was just a distraction, no one got hurt. But still, it's just the start."

Flamepaw widened her eyes. What did her mother mean?

"The start of what?"

Greycloud shook her head,"I've said too much."

Flamepaw dug her claws into the ground. No one in Starclan would ever give her a direct answer!

"I have to send you back." Greycloud mewed.

Flamepaw tilted her head, confused, "Back to where?"

Greycloud rolled her eyes," Back to the clans. They are worried sick about you!"

Flamepaw had completely forgot! The battle! The only thing she remembered was the feeling of being dragged away from the scorching flames.

Her mother rested her chin on Flamepaw's head, "I'll always be watching."

Flamepaw had to ask something to her mother, "Wait, who saved me in the fire?"

Greycloud looked puzzled.

The grey queen opened her mouth to reply, but she faded away without another word.

...~...~...~...~...~...

Flamepaw opened an eye. The first sight she saw was Lillypaw standing over her.

"She's alive! She's okay!"

Lillypaw bent towards her, "I've already treated some of your wounds, but I could only find so much on the island. I think you'll be okay until we get back to camp."

Flamepaw lifted her head,"What happened?"

"Well, after Silverstar and Snakestar attacked, Wolfstar lost a life."

Flamepaw felt worried for her leader. She had to be okay!

Lillypaw kept speaking,"After she lost a life, a *hug*e lightning bolt struck the ground, causing a fire."

Flamepaw gasped. So, Starclan finally had put stop to the battle!

"Everyone stopped fighting and ran for the lake's edge. When everyone had gotten there, we realized that *yo*u weren't with us! Shadowheart looked for you, but couldn't find you."

Yeah right! I doubt that!

"I thought you were dead, and so did the clan! When you showed up, it was a big relief." Lillypaw meowed.

That was were Flamepaw was confused. She didn't save herself, someone else did!

"I didn't just *show u*p, someone saved me!" Flamepaw protested.

Lillypaw tilted her head,"I don't think so. Maybe you were just imagining it. I mean, you did inhale a ton of smoke. Maybe you were having a hallucination."

Flamepaw shook her head. She *kne*w she had been saved. She had felt the teeth in her scruff and had felt a pelt brushing hers.

Flamepaw blinked, she shouldn't be pondering over who saved her. Starclan had been attacked! No one should dare to attack them! And, why would they, or, *how* could they?

Greycloud said that it was just the beginning. Did she mean that there is more darkness to come?

Chapter Fourteen

Flamepaw felt a tongue rasp over her ears. She turned, it was Snowstorm.

"Are you well enough to walk back to camp?" The white tom casted an angry glance at the Riverclan and Shadowclan warriors.

Flamepaw mumbled, "I think so."

Snowstorm helped Flamepaw to her paws. Flamepaw grunted as blood oozed out of her neck. She began to feel light headed.

Lillypaw rushed over to her, "Starclan! Let me help you!"

Flamepaw leaned on Snowstorm and Lillypaw as they padded towards the fallen tree bridge.

Flamepaw noticed Wolfstar trailing behind the rest of Thunderclan.

I hope she's okay!

Flamepaw examined her clanmates around her. Most only had a few scratches, but some, had a ripped flank or a bitten neck.

I might have gotten the worst of it.

Flamepaw slowly looked at her wounds. She gagged at the sight.

Her flank was matted and bloody, with flecks of black where the scorching flames had reached her. Flamepaw's shoulder had two large fang marks, where blood slowly oozed. Though she couldn't see her neck, Flamepaw guessed that it was worse than everything else.

The pain was almost unbearable, but Flamepaw forced herself to keep walking towards the bridge.

They arrived, and slowly, Thunderclan began to cross.

Tigerfang, who had a torn ear, and a slashed leg, stumbled across the fallen tree. Blackfrost aided her, by her side.

Addertooth and his apprentice, Fiercepaw padded across, lashing their tails angrily.

At least they weren't injured too bad.

Finally, it was Flamepaw's turn to cross. Snowstorm gently, being careful not to touch any wounds, grabbed Flamepaw by the scruff, and pulled her onto the bridge. Lillypaw scurried to her side.

Though the pain was excruciating, Flamepaw managed to stand up on her own. Snowstorm and Lillypaw guided her across, watching the dark waters closely.

If I was to fall in, I would definitely join Starclan !

Addertooth was waiting at the end of the bridge. He hoisted Flamepaw onto his broad shoulders and gently laid her on the grassy ground.

"You fought well, Flamepaw." He whispered.

Flamepaw was surprised. After Greycloud had died, her father had scarcely even looked at her, let alone talk to her!

"Th-Thanks." Flamepaw studdered quietly.

Addertooth nodded, then bounded towards Fiercepaw.

Snowstorm and Lillypaw joined Flamepaw on the ground, and the three cats padded towards camp.

...~...~...~...~...~...~...~...

"What *happened?"* Heronflight screeched as soon as the clan limped into camp.

Wolfstar looked at the pale queen, "We were attacked. I will speak about this later. Right now, there are cats that must be treated."

"And *you* are one of them."

Flamepaw watched as Dappleleaf bounded towards her leader.

"In my den, immediately." Dappleleaf demanded.

Wolfstar started to protest, but Dappleleaf laid her tail across her leader's mouth, "Don't tell me that you are hardly injured, because I *kno*w you aren't." Dappleleaf raised her voice, "Anyone who has a neck wound, flank wound, or belly wound, come to my den. I'll treat the worst first."

Lillypaw flicked her tail, "Come on, let me bring you to the medicine den."

Casting one last look at her injured clanmates, Flamepaw leaned on Lillypaw, and limped to the medicine den.

...~...~...~...~...~...~...~...~...

"You are definitely spending the night in here." Dappleleaf declared.

Flamepaw groaned. Why couldn't she just sleep in her own nest? She had had enough of the medicine den when she was a kit.

"Why?" Flamepaw complained.

Dappleleaf rolled her eyes, "So I can keep an eye on you. Shadowheart told me that you were unconscious for a little while. You've lost a lot of blood and your burns need to be treated throughout the night."

Flamepaw sighed. At least she wouldn't have to put up with Hawkpaw's loud snoring tonight.

Maybe I can get some decent rest and go back to training in a few days!

Flamepaw sat still as Dappleleaf applied a poultice to her wounds. At first the juices stung, but then a soothing sensation spread throughout Flamepaw's body. It felt much better already.

"You'll be fine, you just need rest now." Dappleleaf mewed, "But

first, you need to have some of this."

Flamepaw's eyes lit up as Dappleleaf laid a piece of a honeycomb in front of her.

Oh wow! This is going to taste great!

Though Flamepaw had never had honey, the elders had said that the comb tasted sweet, and it soothed sore throats.

"This will help your throat. I'm sure it probably stings from breathing in all of that smoke." Dappleleaf explained, sorting through a pile of moss.

Flamepaw nodded. Her throat did feel scratchy. She leaned forward and gently grabbed the honeycomb in her jaws.

Immediately, the sweet flavor danced on her tongue. It tasted wonderful! She let the honey drip down her throat. All the pain slowly eased.

Flamepaw was very disappointed when the honey was gone. She looked at Dappleleaf hopefully.

"Sorry. Honey is very hard to get. Lillypaw got stung twice while collecting that small piece."

Flamepaw's tail drooped. She would just have to wait until another time.

Dappleleaf laid a pile of moss on to the dusty ground. She began to flatten it out, "This will be your nest. I'll go fetch some pigeon feathers to make it a little softer."

Flamepaw limped over to the moss and settled down. Flamepaw closed her eyes. The memory of when she was a kit flashed in her mind.

"*Sleep? Sleep? No one can sleep in this place!" A fiery kit meowed angrily.*

A beautiful grey she-cat licked her ears, "You can sleep in my nest," She

said temptingly, "It's extra comfy."

The fiery kit perked her ears, the growled, "Fine."

She settled down into the soft nest, then drifted off to sleep.

Flamepaw opened her eyes. The memory had torn a hole in her heart. Everything had seemed so easy back then.

Greycloud was still alive, Sharppaw wasn't mad at her, she didn't have the weight of a prophecy on her shoulders.

If only I could be so care free again...

Flamepaw sighed, then lied her head down on her paws.

She then drifted off into a sleep filled with blood and death.

Chapter Fifteen

Cries of agony echoed in Flamepaw's ears. The stench of blood was overbearing. The scene of Greycloud's death played out before her.

She could see the towering badger, could feel it's sickly breath. She could almost feel the jaws clamp around her neck. The fangs that had ended her mother's life.

Flamepaw let out a strangled screech as Jaggedfang's body was torn apart by savage dogs. His blood flowed all around her, creating a tide of the crimson substance.

This is just a dream! This has to be!

Everything seemed real. The echoing cries, the smell of blood, the emaciated bodies of her loved ones.

Flamepaw wanted to open her eyes, to wake up in her warm mossy nest in the medicine den, but she couldn't.

The cries consumed her, until all she could hear or think about was death.

She crumpled to the ground as a wave of blood gushed around her. A second wave hit, sending Flamepaw tumbling.

The blood poured into her mouth, seeping into her lungs. Struggling even to breath, Flamepaw sputtered blood from her mouth. She could feel the tide sweeping her away.

Suddenly, a eerie voice sounded in her ears, "A roaring lion will show the way to the fading sky..."

Flamepaw felt blood wash over her, filling her lungs once more, then everything went black.

~~**~**~**~**~**

"Flamepaw? Flamepaw!"

Flamepaw jolted up in her nest. She could feel herself burning with fever. Immediately, pain swallowed her.

She blinked and saw Lillypaw standing beside her with an anxious expression on her face.

"What is it, Lillypaw?" Flamepaw murmured through gritted teeth.

Lillypaw flicked her tail anxiously, "You were thrashing around in your nest and moaning. I rose and saw that you had opened up a few wounds." Lillypaw paused for a breath, "Flamepaw, you are burning with fever."

Flamepaw felt horrible. Not only from the pain she was experiencing, but from her horrifying dream.

The strange cat's words whispered in her mind, "*The roaring lion will show the way to the fading sky..."*

Flamepaw painfully shook her head, *What could it mean? It didn't sound like a warning it sounded like...*

Flamepaw's eyes widened at her thought, *A prophecy...*

"Is something wrong?" Lillypaw questioned.

Flamepaw couldn't tell the apprentice about her dream. She couldn't tell Dappleleaf either. And that left... no one.

Flamepaw shrugged, "No, nothing is wrong. But could you give me something for my fever?"

Lillypaw nodded, then bounded to the herb stock.

I will just have to bear the burden of this prophecy by myself.

Lillypaw returned with two small herbs in her mouth. She plopped them down next to Flamepaw, "Feverfew. Eat it, it'll help."

Flamepaw bent down and scooped the herbs up on her tongue. It

wasn't the best flavor she had tasted, but it wasn't too bad.

Lillypaw licked Flamepaw's ear, "Get some rest. It's almost dawn."

Flamepaw's heart dropped, Shadowheart had said that she could go on dawn patrol today.

"Cheer up, Dappleleaf said that you could go back to training in two days!" Lillypaw meowed happily.

Flamepaw sighed, then drifted off into a -thankfully- dreamless sleep.

...**...**...**...**...**...**...**...

Flamepaw perked her ears as she heard her clan leader's voice,"All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the highledge!"

Paws pounded into the den. Flamepaw looked up, it was Sharppaw!

"Wh-What are *you* doing here?" Flamepaw gasped.

Her sister hardly ever spoke to her anymore, unless she was insulting Flamepaw.

Sharppaw flicked her tail excitedly, "Goldenpaw, Hawkpaw, and Fiercepaw are being made warriors!"

Flamepaw's heart leaped in her chest. Sure, she was happy for Goldenpaw, but she would finally be able to go outside!

She had been stuck in the den for two days already, doing nothing but watching water slowly drip through the rock ceiling.

Sharppaw beckoned Flamepaw, "Come on!"

Flamepaw literally leaped out of her nest. Her nicely healed wounds not hurting a bit.

Dappleleaf had made sure that Flamepaw didn't move for two days. Though it was boring, it was worth it. Her wounds and burns were

almost completely gone.

Sharppaw stopped at the entrance, "I'm glad you're okay."

Flamepaw nearly fainted at her words. Did Sharppaw really just say that?

"Um... thanks." Flamepaw meowed slowly.

Sharppaw nodded then guided Flamepaw to a grassy patch underneath the highledge.

Wolfstar was already on top, waiting for her clan to gather beneath her. Her eyes brightened as she saw Flamepaw.

When her clan had gathered, she began the ceremony, "I, Wolfstar, leader of Thunderclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down upon these apprentices. They have trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend them to you as a warrior in their turn."

"Goldenpaw, Hawkpaw, and Fiercepaw, please come forward." Wolfstar meowed.

The three cats slowly padded forward. Goldenpaw cast a nervous glance at Flamepaw before turning around to look at her leader.

"Do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend this clan, even at the cost of your life?" Wolfstar's gaze traveled from each apprentice.

Fiercepaw stepped forward, "I do."

Hawkpaw lashed his tail,"I do."

Goldenpaw flicked her ears, "I do."

Wolfstar dipped her head, "Very well then. Fiercepaw, from this moment forward you will be known as Fiercestorm. Starclan honors your courage and fierce loyalty."

Fiercestorm touched noses with her leader, then turned to face her

clan.

"Hawkpaw, from this moment forward you will be known as Hawktalon."

Hawktalon padded forward to touch noses with Wolfstar.

"Starclan honors your skill in battle and your honesty." Wolfstar meowed.

Goldenpaw flicked her tail as Wolfstar turned to her, "Goldenpaw, from this moment forward, you will be known as Goldenspirit. Starclan honors your bravery and your strong spirit."

As Goldenspirit touched noses with her leader, the clan shouted the new warriors' names.

"Fiercestorm! Hawktalon! Goldenspirit!"

Flamepaw was filled with longing as Wolfstar presented them as warriors.

I'll be up there soon enough.

Flamepaw turned to see Sharppaw looking at her with sadness in her eyes.

"I'm sorry!" Sharppaw blurted.

Flamepaw tilted her head, "Why?"

"For being such a piece of fox dung. I've been so horrible to you, and you've lost more than I have!" Sharppaw whispered.

Flamepaw couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"I realized that it's not your fault for Greycloud being killed. I mean, you saved my life when we were kits, and I was mad at you for that!"

Flamepaw blinked. Her sister was right, she had felt abandoned, kicked out, hated. But now, Sharppaw had made up for it. And

Flamepaw forgave her.

"Its fine, really." Flamepaw murmured.

Sharppaw shook her head, "No it's not! If you had have done what I did to me, I would feel heartbroken. All I can ask is, can you forgive me?"

Flamepaw felt all kinds of emotions rise up inside her, "Don't worry, I forgive you."

Sharppaw let out a sigh of relief, then brushed her cheek against Flamepaw's. "I'm glad to have you as a sister."

Flamepaw closed her eyes, and breathed, "Me too."

Chapter Sixteen

Flamepaw pulled away from her sister's cheek. She felt joy rise inside of her. Sharppaw, the real Sharppaw, was back!

Maybe, just maybe, I won't have to carry the burden of the prophecy alone.

Sharppaw flicked Flamepaw's ear,"Come on!" She mewed,"Maybe we can go out hunting!"

Flamepaw's whiskers quivered with excitement, "Okay!"

Hopefully Dappleleaf will let me go.

"I need to do something first." Flamepaw bounded into the medicine den

The tortoiseshell she-cat was sorting through, what smelled like, a pile of catmint.

The medicine cat turned around as Flamepaw entered the den, "Can I help you?"

Flamepaw flicked her tail with annoyance,"Yes, you can. I was wondering if I could go out hunting."

Dappleleaf sighed,"Yes. Just be su-"

Flamepaw nodded eagerly, then darted out of the den before the she-cat could say any more.

Finally, I get to go outside the camp!

Flamepaw padded to where her sister was eagerly waiting.

"Ready to go?" Sharppaw meowed.

"Yep!"

"Ok, let's go." Sharppaw flicked her ears, then bounded out of camp with Flamepaw on her tail.

~~~~*~~*~~*~~*~~*

"Bet you can't climb that high!" Sharppaw dared, pointing to a dangerously high branch with her tail.

Flamepaw narrowed her eyes,"I bet I *ca*n."

Flamepaw had missed the challenging dares her and Sharppaw had done as kits. It felt like the care free days that they had spent as kits once again.

Sharppaw chuckled, "Fine, do it then."

Flamepaw shrugged, "Okay."

Flamepaw examined the old maple tree. The branch was at least thirty foxlengths high, maybe even more. Flamepaw immediately found a good paw hold in the bark. She got a running start, then leapt onto the tree.

She sunk her claws into the hard bark, and hauled herself onto a wide branch. She examined the ground below. She was only about five tail lengths off of the ground.

I can do this. Easily.

Flamepaw jumped onto the branch above her and scrabbled to the top. Out of breath, she paused.

"You sure you can do that?" Flamepaw heard Sharppaw's voice below her.

"You bet I can!" She shouted down through all of the green and orange leaves.

Since there wasn't any branches close by, Flamepaw edged to the end of the branch, and sunk her claws into the tree trunk. After a few foxlengths of climbing, her destination came into view.

Flamepaw forced herself to move faster. Finally, she pulled herself onto the small branch. She looked down. Sharppaw looked like an ant through the leaves.

Flamepaw peered through the leaves again. She noticed something, different. Flamepaw knew something was wrong. Her eyes grew wide. The happy and bright day, suddenly growing darker.

It was hard to miss the two dark colored cats pelting towards her sister.

Chapter Seventeen

Flamepaw didn't have time to say a warning as the two cats leaped onto Sharppaw.

Flamepaw struggled to leap from branch to branch as quickly as she could. She could hear the screeches of battle below her. She had to reach Sharppaw!

Suddenly, tree battle training came into mind. Flamepaw remembered Jaggedfang teaching her about leaping on top of your enemies, and pinning them to the ground.

Reaching a branch about seven tail lengths from the at he ground, Flamepaw readied herself to jump. She spotted a black tom scratching at Sharppaw's flank.

That's who I'll go for.

Letting out a ear splitting screech, Flamepaw dropped herself onto her opponent. The black tom crumpled to the ground, blood beginning to ooze from a gash Flamepaw had made in his back.

Flamepaw shot a quick glance at her sister. She was bravely fighting a dark grey tom, quickly raking her claws down his side.

Turning back to her opponent, Flamepaw sunk her teeth into the tom's ear, he let out a scream of pain. Blood gushed into her mouth, it's warm scent filled Flamepaw's nostrils. Trying not to gag, Flamepaw let go.

She flipped the tom over onto his back, she immediately recognized Rowanpaw, of Shadowclan.

She let out a snarl, "What do you think you are doing here, you piece of fox dung?"

The tom struggled, but Flamepaw sunk her claws into his belly fur, careful not to cause any real damage. The tom gritted his teeth in

pain.

"Well? Speak!" Flamepaw growled as fierce as she could mange.

She almost felt sorry for Rowanpaw. His rubs stuck out along his sides, and the hollowness of his eyes gave away that he was clearly starving.

"What do we have here?"

Flamepaw whipped around to see Tigerfang, along with Cloudrunner and Brackenpelt standing with their claws unsheathed and their fangs bared.

Flamepaw breathed a sigh of relief. Though she wasn't hurt at all, she could feel exhaustion creeping over her from the skirmish.

"We don't have all day you know! So I suggest you speak now!" Tigerfang growled.

The apprentice that Sharppaw had pinned down spoke up, "Its none of your concern!"

Tigerfang snarled, then leapt onto the apprentice, pushing Sharppaw onto the ground.

"It *is* my concern when *you* are on *my* territory!" Tigerfang hissed into the apprentice's ear.

Flamepaw noticed that the other apprentice was Cedarpaw, also from Shadowclan.

Cedarpaw cringed at Tigerfang's words.

Brackenpelt stepped forward, "Come. Let's get these two... *intruders* back to our camp."

Tigerfang nodded her head in agreement, then forced Cedarpaw to his paws.

Cloudrunner got Rowanpaw up on his paws, then pushed him in front, "Move! You wanted to be in our territory, how about you go

talk to Wolfstar instead?"

I would hate to be them right now.

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"What do you two have to say for yourselves?"

Flamepaw stared as Wolfstar questioned the two Shadowclan apprentices in front of the entire clan.

Neither apprentice spoke up.

Wolfstar shrugged, "Fine. If you won't speak to me, maybe we should go talk to Snakestar about your little...intrusion."

At her words, Rowanpaw and Cedarpaw exchanged nervous glances.

"You aren't allowed on our territory!" Rowanpaw protested.

Wolfstar chuckled, "Oh? And what makes *you* allowed on *ours*?"

That shut Rowanpaw up. The black tom looked down at his paws, nervousness spiking his pelt.

"Tigerfang, Sharppaw, and Flamepaw," Wolfstar called, "You are coming with me. We are going to Shadowclan."

...**...**...**...**...**...**...

The acrid scent of Shadowclan rose around Flamepaw. She tried not to gag as the scent wafted down her throat.

"How do they put up with this horrible stench?" Flamepaw whispered to Sharppaw.

Sharppaw shrugged, "Dunno, they don't smell much better," Sharppaw flicked her tail towards the two apprentices.

Flamepaw stifled a laugh. It had been so long since she and her sister had joked. It felt good.

Wolfstar lead the way through Shadowclan territory. She acted like she had been there before.

Maybe she has.

Finally, they arrived to a prickly barrier. The six cats padded through the, supposed, clan entrance.

Surprised meows and murmurs greeted them.

"What are *they* doing here?"

"Thunderclan thinks that they can go anywhere they want?"

"Why are Rowanpaw and Cedarpaw with them?"

Wolfstar straightened as the deputy, Darkshadow, padded forward," We have come to bring back some *trespassing* apprentices."

The fur on the deputy's neck began to rise, "Are you saying that Shadowclan was trespassing?"

Wolfstar lashed her silvery tail, "Yes. That's exactly what I'm saying."

Protesting howls and hisses erupted from a crowd of gathered warriors.

Flamepaw scanned the camp. It wasn't her imagination, Shadowclan looked unusually scrawny, especially for the end of greenleaf.

"Is there a problem?"

Flamepaw looked to see the light brown she-cat, Snakestar.

"Yes," Wolfstar growled, "There is."

Snakestar flicked her tail, beckoning Wolfstar to speak.

"These two apprentices attacked Sharppaw and Flamepaw on *our* territory!" Wolfstar declared.

A few gasps came from the small crowd.

Snakestar hissed, "A Shadowclan cat would do no such thing!"

Wolfstar shrugged, "These did."

Snakestar whipped around, piercing Flamepaw with her snake like eyes, "Did you come whining to your leader?"

Flamepaw struggled to keep her fur flat, "They were breaking the warrior code! And they attacks us!"

Wolfstar lashed her tail, "Thunderclan cats do not lie. I just hope that you will punish these two, " Wolfstar jerked her head towards the two apprentices.

Snakestar let out a furious hiss, "Don't tell me how to run my clan!"

Wolfstar flicked her ears, "Oh Snakestar, I wouldn't dare."

Darkshadow bared his fangs, "I think it's time you four be leaving."

Wolfstar licked her gleaming white fangs, then padded towards the Shadowclan entrance.

"And by the way," Wolfstar added over her shoulder, "That was one cowardly attack at the *Gathering*."

Wolfstar lashed her tail and led the three cats outside of the camp; leaving all of Shadowclan glaring at her with hatred in their eyes.

Chapter Eighteen

Flamepaw padded towards the freshkill pile as soon as they reached Thunderclan camp. Her paws ached and her muscles were sore from climbing the maple tree, and from the skirmish.

Snowstorm padded up to Wolfstar, "I see that you don't have any scratches rebounds, so I take that it went well."

Wolfstar flicked her ears,"We need to talk, in my den."

Snowstorm nodded, then followed Wolfstar into her den.

"Wow! So what was it like?" Goldenspirit's voice jolted Flamepaw out of the previous conversation.

Flamepaw asked, "What was what like?"

"You know, Shadowclan territory?"

Flamepaw bit into the thrush she had picked out, "Oh," She meowed through a mouthful of feathers, "It had a lot of pine trees."

"And it smelled terrible." Sharppaw added, laying a shrew down next to Flamepaw.

Goldenspirit laughed, "Guess I didn't miss much!"

Flamepaw glanced at Sharppaw, "Well actually, Snakestar got pretty aggressive."

Goldenspirit looked jealous. Even though she had been made a warrior, she acted just the same. Fun, kind, and loyal. Flamepaw was glad that she had her as a friend.

"Goldenspirit! Evening patrol!" Redstorm called from the clan entrance.

"Gotta go. See ya!" Goldenspirit bounded towards the clan entrance,

where Redstorm, Hawktalon, and Runningspirit were waiting.

Flamepaw took another bite out of her thrush. It was a little cold, but still delicious.

"Snowstorm said that we are going to practice battle training tomorrow." Sharppaw lowered her voice,"The only bad thing is, we'll have to practice with Dewpaw, Rainpaw, and Dustpaw."

Flamepaw let out an exaggerated moan, then brightened up, "At least we can show them are great fighting skills! "

Sharppaw chuckled, "I can't wait to pin down Dewpaw. That annoying furball!"

Flamepaw twitched her whiskers in amusement. Suddenly, a yawn escaped her jaws.

"Mmm, I'm tired. I think I'm going to go to my nest." Flamepaw announced to her sister.

Sharppaw nodded, "Ok, I think I'll join you in a little bit."

Flamepaw blinked, then padded slowly into the apprentice den.

~~**~~**~~**~~**~~

Flamepaw stretched and let out a yawn. The sun was barely peeking over the trees. Snowstorm had insisted that they leave the camp before dawn, just to squeeze in a little extra training time. Shadowheart had to stay behind at camp to fix the elders den, which had a leak in the roof.

I'd rather have less training and more sleep.

Sharppaw's tail flicked Flamepaw's side, "Did you hear what Ravenclaw said?"

Flamepaw shook her head, "Um, no."

Sharppaw rolled her eyes, "She said we are going to play a game. We have to capture the piece of fresh-kill on the other side of he

clearing. Who ever captures the piece of fresh-kill first gets to eat it."

Flamepaw perked her ears. She hadn't eaten this morning, so her stomach was rumbling. "Who are we being paired up with?"

"Listen and you'll find out." Sharppaw hissed quietly.

"Dewpaw and Rainpaw, you will be paired with Flamepaw." Owltalon announced.

Flamepaw's tail drooped. Not Dewpaw! The grey tom hadn't acted the same ever since Greycloud had died. He acted skiddish around Flamepaw, not the same annoying furball he once was.

"Sharppaw will be with Dustpaw. Since the teams are uneven, Goldenspirit will be on Sharppaw's team." Ravenclaw mewed as Goldenspirit padded forward.

Goldenspirit was supposed to be watching the training session, and even showing a few battle moves. She was lucky that she could join in this fun training.

It's going to hard to beat her! And Sharppaw !

Cloudrunner laid a shrew at one side of the clearing, "Sharppaw's team will try to defend the piece of fresh-kill, while Flamepaw's will try to retrieve it."

Ravenclaw pitched in,"You can retrieve the prey in any way you can. Just make sure your claws are sheathed."

Flamepaw nodded. She couldn't wait! This was going to be a great training!

Flamepaw's team started on the opposite side of the clearing, while Sharppaw, Dustpaw, and Goldenspirit took their place the freshkill.

"Ready, GO!" Owltalon shouted.

Flamepaw turned to Dewpaw, "You and Rainpaw hold off Sharppaw and Dustpaw. I'll handle Goldenspirit."

Rainpaw looked like he was about to protest but Flamepaw flicked her tail across his mouth. "And....now!"

Rainpaw charged into Sharppaw, sending her sprawling. Dewpaw barreled into Dustpaw, pinning the brown she-cat to the ground.

Flamepaw creeped around the fighting cats and found the piece of fresh-kill. Goldenspirit was circling around it warily.

I have to do this quickly, or else I won't be able to at all.

Flamepaw pelted towards Goldenspirit. She darted to the left, then the right, confusing the golden warrior. Flamepaw slithered forward and landed a forceful blow on Goldenspirit's head.

The stunned warrior stood still while Flamepaw grabbed the shrew in her jaws. She weaved through a pinned to the ground Dustpaw. She leaped over Sharppaw, who had Dewpaw pinned to the ground.

She finally made it to her side of the clearing. Flamepaw let out a successful yowl.

"We have a winner!" Cloudrunner announced.

Dewpaw bounced excitedly on his paws and Rainpaw lashed his tail.

Flamepaw started to dig in to the fresh-kill, savoring the flavor. Dewpaw and Rainpaw began to eat as well. Though the meal was small, it satisfied Flamepaw's rumbling belly.

Owltalon stepped forward, "It's time we go back to camp."

...~...~...~

Flamepaw padded beside Goldenspirit as they group made their way back to camp.

"Nice moves! You actually had me confused!" Goldenspirit declared.

The cats all arrived back at camp talking happily about the game. The training had worn Flamepaw out. She padded up to

Snowstorm, "Can I rest for a while?"

The white tom nodded his broad head.

Flamepaw wearily made her way to her nest and plopped down.

Finally, I can get some rest.

Flamepaw felt Sharppaw settle down next to her, "Good job today."

Flamepaw grunted. It felt great to be with her sister.

This is the life I've always dreamed of...

Chapter Nineteen

Flamepaw coughed and opened her eyes. The apprentice den seemed... blurry.

Flamepaw sat up in her nest. She coughed again. Her blue eyes began to water and her heart leaped in her chest.

No! It can't be!

The crackling above her head proved that Flamepaw's horrible suspicion was indeed correct.

"Fire! Fire!" Flamepaw screeched as loud as she could manage.

Immediately, the camp erupted into cries and screeches of terror. Flamepaw pushed a surprised Dustpaw in front of her as she charged out of the den.

Sharppaw was already outside grasping Heronflight's kit, Willowkit, in her jaws.

Wolfstar was leading a group of elders, consisting of Dovewing, Mousewhisker, and Cherryfeather, up the ravine. Heronflight followed with Lionkit in her grasp. Swiftpelt held Petalkit, as he raced put of the flaming camp.

Flamepaw looked around for her mentor, Shadowheart. He was no where to be seen.

Hopefully he already has left the camp.

A scorched branch fell in front of Flamepaw, interrupting her desperate thoughts. The ground in front of her burst into flames, causing Flamepaw to scramble backwards in alarm.

Fur brushed Flamepaw's side, "Come on! We have to get out of here!"

Flamepaw nodded in agreement at Sharppaw's words.

"Go on! I'll be right behind you!" Flamepaw gasped, struggling to breathe through the thick smoke.

Sharppaw bounded up the ravine, careful not to touch any burning areas of grass.

Flamepaw saw Runningspirit race out of the camp, a long burn across her flank.

I don't think anyone knows that I'm still down here!

A pitiful cry made Flamepaw whip around. A small brown shape huddled beneath the highledge. Flames engulfed the area around it, making it hard to see the kit.

"Mudkit!" Flamepaw screamed, her voice hoarse from the fire.

I can't leave him to die!

Flamepaw pelted to the highledge and peered through the flames.

"Come as far as you can with out getting burned!" Flamepaw called to Mudkit.

Instead of following Flamepaw's instructions, Mudkit began to wail loudly.

He's not going to listen to me! We are both going to die!

Flamepaw looked around, desperate to find a way to save the kit, and herself.

Suddenly, she saw it. She would have to climb the highledge, drop down below, grab Mudkit, and claw her way back up. It was risky, but what other choice did she have?

Starclan help me!

Flamepaw scrabbled onto the highledge, her head feeling woozy from breathing in smoke. Flamepaw edged to the end of the ledge,

and peered down. Not hesitating, she dropped.

Luckily, she landed on her paws. Unfortunately, her tail was on fire.

Screeching in agony, Flamepaw writhed on the ground, putting out the flames.

She sprung to her paws and grabbed Mudkit in her mouth and clawed her way to the top of highledge. Almost immediately, fire crackled right where they were previously standing.

Flamepaw leaped off of highledge, and dodged flaming branches and ferns. She saw what was left of the nursery. It was nothing but a blackened pile of branches and twigs.

Sadness pulled at her, but she pushed it away. Flamepaw had to get Mudkit, and herself, out of the camp!

The ravine loomed before them, a few small flames were around it, crackling on the soft grass that surrounded it.

Come on! I've come this far, I can't give up!

Flamepaw scrambled onto the first ledge, then the second. She leaped from ledge to ledge until she reached the top. Heronflight was waiting there, with a horrified expression on her face.

She grabbed Mudkit from Flamepaw's jaws, then bounded into the line of trees behind her.

Suddenly, the rocks beneath Flamepaw began to crack. The rocks crumbled and crashed to the ground, leaving Flamepaw hanging on, by a small sliver of rock.

The bushes beside her rustled, and a figure stepped out.

"Look here... a perfect little predicament your in, eh?"

Flamepaw growled at the voice, only to slip farther.

"Please, Shadowheart, help!" Flamepaw pleaded.

Shadowheart let out a hiss, "Oh, how nice. Once *you* are dead, the prophecy won't come true! At least not all of it. Oh, they'll find a different cat to get the job done, don't you worry."

What does he mean? A different cat?

Flamepaw struggled to hang on. Her paws were starting to bleed from all of the climbing.

"Once you are dead, my work will be almost complete!" He chuckled.

Flamepaw gasped. *He wants me dead!*

"Please Shadowheart!" Flamepaw cried, as one of her paws slipped. Now the only thing separating the barrier between her life and her death was Shadowheart.

Shadowheart laughed, "Ha! How pitiful," Shadowheart let out a snarl, "Enjoy your, *destiny!"*

Flamepaw didn't have time to do anything as Shadowheart reached forward, and pushed her off of the ravine...

...Down into the beckoning flames.

END OF BOOK THREE

Author's Note

I just wanted to say, thank you to all who read, voted, and commented on *A Darkened Heart.* It really means a lot! I want to thank all of you for being so supportive of me while writing this book, and my other ones too! I don't know what I'd do without you guys! Thanks again!

~Flameheart

*Leave your favorite character from this book in the comments! I'd like to know! :)